

New look, New York

There's no shortage of new ways to view this ever-evolving city. **Ben Ireland** makes a brand-new start of it

Iwo rhinos. This harness can carry the weight of not one, but two whole rhinos. That's what I'm clinging on to – quite literally – as I lower my body over the edge of the highest outdoor observation deck in the western hemisphere.

Looking down at the Empire State Building, once the tallest skyscraper in the world, my heart stops for what feels like the fifth time since we embarked on the City Climb at 30 Hudson Yards in west Manhattan.

I fall forward and, after half a second of the purest fear I've ever felt, the harness tightens. I exhale, and suddenly feel free, like a bird soaring over the top of the most famous skyline in the world. I'm king of the hill, top of the heap.

At 1,260ft, things on the ground appear awfully small, offering a new perspective on the world. And as travel emerges from the grips of a pandemic that brought the industry and most of the globe to a standstill, including the city that never sleeps, it feels like new perspectives are very important.

CHANGING PLACES

New York has changed since Brits were last allowed to visit. The Edge, the observation deck on the same building, at a mere 1,100ft high, temporarily closed just two days after opening on March 11, 2020, due to Covid. It was 608 days until City Climb opened on November 9, when *Travel Weekly* was among the first to experience it, but UK citizens were barred from travelling to the US for leisure for 602 of those.

A walk up Fifth Avenue to Times Square, on to Broadway and Hell's Kitchen, did not so much feel eerily quiet as rather gradually gathering pace. New York did go to sleep, but it's waking up again, and the return of UK and EU travellers is a big part of that.

Street sellers of musical tickets and hot dog stall vendors were excited to hear the British accent, and from a traveller's perspective, tickets to in-demand shows are more accessible and crowds less manic.

Like many places, masks are required, and like many places, about 60% were adhering to the ➤

City Climb at The Edge, Manhattan
PICTURE: The Edge

DESTINATIONS

THE US | NEW YORK CITY



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: View from the Empire State Building; Little Island; the High Line; cyclist on Brooklyn Bridge; The Edge

PICTURES: Shutterstock/Alexander Prokopenko, Nick Starichenko, Audley C Bullock; Evan Joseph Images; Edge



recommendation. I was told, in typical New York fashion, to “forget about it” when I put one on to enter a pizza shop.

Other subtle changes have made getting around easier. New York completed its rollout of contactless payments on the subway in January 2021, and is in the midst of a cycling revolution – with a record number of new bike lanes announced this year.

The most noticeable change to the city is in Hudson Yards, west Manhattan. Home to The Edge and City Climb, more modern skyscrapers are still being built. While these began to open in 2019, it will be 2024 before the project is completed. I lost count of the number of people who told me “the city is moving west” during my three-day visit.

Also out west is The High Line, a former raised railway converted into an elevated public park weaving between New York’s iconic skyline. While it opened in 2009, it was extended in 2019. Walk along it from Hudson Yards and you get great views of the river and the city, with a smattering of street art along the way.

GETTING THERE

Virgin Atlantic flies direct between Heathrow and New York JFK up to four times daily until March 2022 and then up to six times daily until April 2022. Return fares start at £344.

The airline also flies daily from Manchester to JFK with return fares from £401. Fares include taxes and inflight food, drink and entertainment, and are subject to change.

virginatlantic.com



PENDRY MANHATTAN WEST

For a contemporary luxury stay in Hudson Yards, look no further than Pendry Manhattan West. While at the pricier end of the market, it is positioned within easy access of scores of New York attractions. Expect all the modern minimalist and understated luxe touches, from bespoke cocktails in its speakeasy-style bar and Peloton bikes in the 24/7 gym to a rooftop terrace, garden room and on-site eastern Mediterranean restaurant Zou Zou’s.

Book it: Rooms start at £539 per night, suites from £1,079, including taxes. pendry.com/manhattan-west

It feels fresh, and leads to another west Manhattan addition: Little Island at Pier 55. Raised on 132 tulip-shaped stilts, this 2.4-acre artificial island opened in May at the spot where the Titanic would have docked in 1912. As well as being a prime picture spot for Instagrammers, it is home to a 687-seat amphitheatre that hosts music and dance shows, often free of charge.

VIEW FROM THE TOP

But in with the new does not mean out with the old in New York. The Empire State Building has reimaged its 102nd-floor observation deck, which offers 360-degree views of Manhattan from the very tip of the skyscraper. This space, closed to the public for decades, reopened in October 2019 with bigger windows and is now considered the ‘crown jewel’ of the attraction, in addition to the more commonly visited 86th floor observatory deck you’ll know from many famous films.

Given the Empire State Building’s status as a New York icon, you may very well want it in your photos, which is why the new development in Hudson Yards is so appealing, whether you want to see it while sipping champagne on The Edge terrace or getting an adrenaline rush at City Climb.

So while New York may have had a nap during the pandemic, the city continues to reinvent itself – and it’s time to start spreading the news. **TW**